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Mayflower: Ode to New Beginnings — Beautiful Connector: Collection Showcase Exhibits as Teaching Tools and Community Builders

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Column Editor's Note: *Libraries' quest to strengthen connections with their constituencies often finds expression in new services and repurposed user spaces. Some literature portrays libraries as focusing away from collections toward new trends in library portfolios, but showcasing collections can prove very effective in bringing the library and user communities closer together. This article recounts two recent library collection showcase exhibits as successful examples of bolstering stakeholder connections. — AM*

Background: Why Collections Exhibits?

Expansion into new services abounds and reflects the changing nature of research, scholarship (Albitz, Avery, & Zabel, 2017; Eden, 2015), and ambitious libraries' pursuit of distinction (Harris, 2016). As a long-established core feature of libraries, collections for their own sake are increasingly viewed as outmoded and secondary to outreach, assessment, instruction (Linden, et al., 2018; Way, 2017), and to new initiatives steeped in technologies or revamped spaces (Fernandez & Tilton, 2018). Yet as distinctive foods remain the defining prerequisite for sustained excellence in renowned restaurants (Jin et al., 2015; Stone et al., 2018), so do library collections remain central to intellectual rigor in teaching, learning, and research by providing information as raw materials for knowledge and discovery (Scull, 2017). Academic faculty acknowledge the importance of collections in the broader contexts of instruction and research support, but many are unaware of the library resources available to them (Schwartz & Albers-Smith, 2015). Learning is enhanced through skilled navigation of information and resources, but meaningful engagement with the curriculum is weakened by incomplete awareness of the collections' extent (Swanson & Jagman, 2015). Providing information resources and expertise in fostering users' research skills and lifelong learning is among the **University of Kentucky Libraries'** strategic goals (UK Libraries, 2015). Exhibits for showcasing collections and related research strategies, especially when combined with marketing and outreach, can prove effective in helping campus communities more fully harness the power of library resources in their research.

Tools for Collections Exhibits

The **University of Kentucky's** nine campus libraries' rich collections support undergraduate through doctoral programs across all disciplines. Our library exhibit spaces host a variety of displays — some exhibits are collaborations with other campus areas, while others showcase special-topic collection areas. In the main university library, physical exhibit spaces include multiple wall spaces for image exhibits, seven locked acrylic exhibit cases in two sizes (complete with lining fabric and display supplies), and six free-standing seven-foot movable kiosks for mounting poster-sized materials. In addition, six wall pillars in a high-traffic location are fitted as digital display screens for virtual exhibits.

Two recent library collection exhibits highlighted particular focal points: The Spring 2018 exhibit focused on Chinese materials from the Window of Shanghai program; the Fall 2018 exhibit showcased jurisprudence and informed citizenship in honor of Constitution Day. Both physical exhibits featured focused samplings of library materials, related artifacts, and pertinent research strategies — all arranged with artistic flair and marketed to campus communities. The larger exhibit in Fall 2018 was augmented with a virtual display in the busy hub area. Companion webpages for each exhibit fed into library marketing, direct invitations to campus contacts, and interactive learning activities. This multi-prong approach boosted exhibit visits and participation in related activities. Both exhibits sparked new conversations and heightened awareness of the library collections' breadth and depth.

Exhibit 1: Window of Shanghai

The Window of Shanghai exhibit (Spring 2018) consisted of a physical exhibit and a companion website with related research strategies. This exhibit highlighted some

of the books received through our library's participation in the Window of Shanghai program. China's **Shanghai Library** launched this cultural exchange program in 2002 as a way to introduce Chinese culture to overseas readers. The **Shanghai Library** donates new Chinese publications to overseas libraries during the partnership's active three-year program period (Window of Shanghai, 2019). Books in this program include heavily illustrated children's books, manga, heavily illustrated books on artistic, architectural, and cultural

An Illustrated book page

A traditional thread-bound book

traditions, as well as handcrafted books thread-bound with traditional silk cord. Coverage includes Chinese medicine, language study for all ages, literature, history, culture, and the arts. The books' breadth of topics and readership levels support undergraduate and graduate students as well as Education students learning to teach foreign languages and cultural heritage in schools.

Supplies and preparations: A few months after my arrival at **UK Libraries** during summer 2017, the library monograph manager and I

Window of Shanghai exhibit companion website

Manga biography of Confucius

Children's book with practice letters

began brainstorming and collaborating on ideas for showcasing Window of Shanghai materials. To broaden instructional reach, we decided to combine a physical exhibit with a companion website. The **physical exhibit** in the cases showed representative samples from the wide range of books and related cultural artifacts on loan from two library colleagues.

The exhibit's **companion webpage** (*Window of Shanghai*, 2018) showed selected photographs of materials on display and included a PDF version of our trifold exhibit brochure. The webpage also

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featured two small sections with research tips to help exhibit visitors find related library materials: One section's live search links focused on specific topics; the other section's live searches linked to materials from specific publishers of library books from the Window of Shanghai program. These live searches facilitated further engagement with related library resources. This successful engagement inspired new ideas for a comprehensive language guide and integrating the Window of Shanghai page therein.

Exhibit 2: Constitution Day

A larger-scale exhibit honoring Constitution Day ran during September 2018. More elaborate in scope, this multifaceted exhibit was a collaboration with the federal regional depository librarian as well as staff and students from her unit. Our brainstorm led us to develop a multimodal exhibit consisting of five distinct yet interrelated elements: (1) a month-long physical exhibit in the atrium, (2) month-long virtual companion exhibit, (3) month-long online learning activities, (4) a reception with U.S. Constitution-themed cake and learning activities on Constitution Day proper, and (5) a companion website used to interlink these physical and online components.

Supplies and preparation: For the collections display, we chose a variety of our books and Government Documents related to the United States Constitution. The federal regional depository librarian worked with the GIS mapping specialist in reproducing several Constitution-related posters published by the U.S. government, identified a set of National Archives historical facsimiles of our nation's founding documents, designed patriotic decorations, and lent several Constitution-related artifacts from her personal collection to enhance the exhibit's historical styling. She also compiled voter registration information for all U.S. states and territories for the exhibit website, planned the learning activities for Constitution Day, designed a Government Documents scavenger hunt, and obtained from the **U.S. Government Publishing Office (GPO)** pocket Constitutions, *Ben's Guide to the Constitution* bookmarks, and other Constitution-themed items as giveaways during the activities on Constitution Day. My part of the exhibit included creating posters of Constitution-related search strategies and sample results, photographing the exhibit and reception, designing three Constitution-related one-question Qualtrics surveys and analyzing responses, posting survey responses to the kiosks and website, and designing the virtual exhibit and companion website. **Event support:** To enhance the exhibit and related activities, our library administration supported purchase of historic document facsimiles, learning materials, a promotional banner, and Constitution-themed cake for the Constitution Day reception. The National Archives' set of parchment-printed historical facsimiles includes the Declaration of Independence, the four-page U.S. Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. We incorporated these historical facsimiles in the physical exhibit — in one of the large cases, the federal depository librarian arranged the parchment Constitution with artistic flair and added her tricorn hat for historical ambiance. To produce our promotional banner, we secured from the **United States Government Publishing Office (GPO)**

permissions and vector files of two versions of **GPO's mascot**, a stylized image of **Benjamin Franklin** (*Ben's Guide*, 2019). From GPO's two image versions, the regional depository librarian chose her preferred **Ben Franklin** image for the banner. My design for the banner layout incorporated her preferred image version against a graduated sky background and anchored by UK Libraries branding; we

worked with a local sign company who produced the retractable and portable stand-up banner. The banner prominently marked the exhibit entry and drew visitors to the poster displays, pointers to online learning activities, and exhibit cases. Since the exhibit, the federal regional depository librarian has incorporated the historical documents and banner in some conference presentations, professional meetings, and collaborative projects.

hands-on and online learning activities. Constitution-related scholarly books encompassed constitutional history, legal scholarship, political science, citizenship education, and biographies of the nation's founders, including a 1973 Russian biography of **George Washington** published by the Young Guard in Moscow (then USSR). Displayed U.S. Government publications included the U.S. Constitution with Amendments in book form, pocket Constitutions, a recent Congressional debate on First

Amendment protections on college campuses, a citizenship toolkit with educational books and civic flashcards, small posters with Constitution-related research strategies, and Constitution-era documents reproduced on parchment. The **kiosks** displayed reproductions of five Constitution-related posters, parchment facsimile of the 1789 *Resolution of the First Congress Submitting Twelve Amendments to the Constitution*, and posters with URLs to three online Constitution surveys. **Constitution Day reception and activities:** September 17th, 2018 marked the 231st anniversary of the Constitution's signing. The Constitution Day celebration kicked off with a cake reception and continued with learning activities including the Government Documents scavenger hunt, a selfie station at the 7-foot Ben-Franklin-themed stand-up banner, Constitution-related conversations, a Constitution-themed jigsaw puzzle, giveaways of Constitution education materials from **GPO**, and encouraging visitors to complete the online Constitution surveys. The **virtual exhibit** comprised a digital slideshow of founding milestones in Constitutional history, search strategies and sample results on several nuanced research topics, the three one-question Constitution survey URLs, visualizations of survey responses, and the QR code and URL to the exhibit website. Three **online surveys** were designed to gather in-person and virtual visitors' thoughts on the Constitution: (1) Add your

a digital slideshow of founding milestones in Constitutional history, search strategies and sample results on several nuanced research topics, the three one-question Constitution survey URLs, visualizations of survey responses, and the QR code and URL to the exhibit website. Three **online surveys** were designed to gather in-person and virtual visitors' thoughts on the Constitution: (1) Add your

Survey respondents' insightful comments on their favorite Constitutional amendments

Exhibit poster and Virtual exhibit slide: Discovery search with results for "United States" "Constitution" AND (education OR teaching OR study)

code and URL to the exhibit website. Three **online surveys** were designed to gather in-person and virtual visitors' thoughts on the Constitution: (1) Add your

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own Constitutional amendment (free-text write-in), (2) Which Constitutional amendment is your favorite? (multiple-choice, plus optional free-text entry for stating why), and (3) interactive preference ranking of all 27 amendments. Survey responses were gathered and updated regularly, with visualizations posted to the exhibit website and physical display kiosks. The exhibit's **companion website** featured selected photos from the physical exhibit and

**Constitution Day exhibit
companion website**

**Compilation of survey
respondents' preference
rankings for all 27 Con-
stitutional amendments**

from the physical exhibit and Constitution Day activities, a PDF version of the virtual exhibit, links to the three Constitution surveys, and a gallery of survey response visualizations. A dropdown

**Dropdown menu for site
navigation**

menu facilitated navigation to the full-text U.S. Constitution and all 27 Amendments, voter registration information for all U.S. states and territories, and library research strategies and resources (*Constitution Day*, 2018).

Observations and Conclusions

Both collection showcase exhibits grew out of successful collaborations. Both exhibits drew visitors and created engagement with research topics and library materials. The Window of Shanghai exhibit spawned conversations related to language teaching and study. The Constitution Day exhibit and hands-on learning activities generated widespread student interest and sparked conversations about campus collaborations for future events. Both exhibits triumphed as purposeful teaching tools and campus connectors, providing a successful blueprint for future outreach.

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